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By Eddie Baeb

Spire winning favor with city, SOAR

The Chicago Spire is gaining traction at City Hall and with an influential neighborhood group.

Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava and Irish developer Garrett Kelleher presented their latest designs for the twisting tower that would be nation's tallest building at a Streeterville Organization of Active Residents (SOAR) meeting Monday night that drew more than 500 people.

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The project's zoning attorney said planning department staff has reached "consensus" for the necessary zoning changes and that he's hopeful the plan commission next month will approve the changes to add more dwelling units and increase the floor-area ratio of the building. Mr. Kelleher says construction could begin in May.

The latest plans, which include a more tapered top and Mr. Calatrava's new design for DuSable Park and a plaza near the building, won praise from SOAR's top two officials.

Brian Hopkins, the group's vice-president, says the board will hold a special meeting April 4 to vote on whether to support the project or object and detail specific changes the group wants.

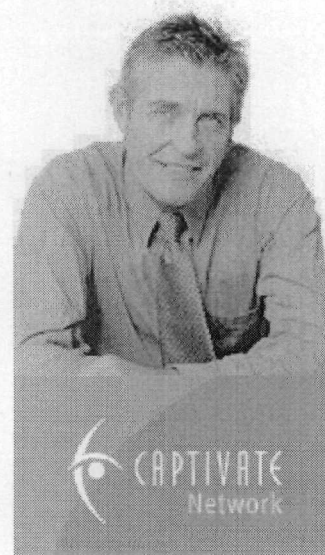
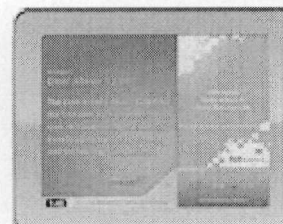
"We're not going to be obstructionist in any way, shape or form," Mr. Hopkins said in an interview after the meeting.

After Mr. Kelleher took over as the project's developer late last year, he scuttled plans for a broadcast antennae and instead added additional floors — bringing the structure to 2,000 feet. He also eliminated plans for a 20-story hotel and some public retail space, and is now seeking to have 1,200 condominiums in the building vs. the earlier plan of having 300 units.

Mr. Kelleher said units in the tower won't be marketed until the third quarter of this year, and he declined to say what they will cost but suggested it could be a new high for the market. "The product we intend to offer certainly hasn't been designed or built to date in Chicago," Mr. Kelleher said. "The prices will reflect that."

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